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WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 3, 2016

STATEMENT FROM THE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE, ON FISCAL YEAR 2017 AGRICULTURE AND FOOD RESEARCH INITIATIVE BUDGET PROPOSAL

DR. SONNY RAMASWAMY, DIRECTOR, NATIONAL INSTITUTE of Food and Agriculture, today made the following statement on the proposed Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 Agriculture and Food Research Initiative Budget Proposal:

"The National Institute of Food and Agriculture applauds President Obama's bold proposal to increase funding for the Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) in his FY2017 budget proposal.

"The President's request for \$700 million for AFRI is the full funding level Congress authorized when they established the 2008 Farm Bill. The President is requesting legislative action to make available \$325 million in mandatory funding to address key agricultural, environmental, and nutrition issues, as part of a government-wide investment in research and development.

"Since AFRI was established, it has been funded only at or below half of its authorized level. Nutritional security is a matter of national security. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2014, NIFA was only able to fund slightly over 10 percent of research proposals we received.

"Here's what increasing AFRI funding would accomplish for our nation:

"Investments would support the discovery of solutions to serious challenges being faced by society, such as poor nutritional outcomes, climate change, pollinator health, and anti-microbial resistant bacteria. AFRI would be better able to support cutting-edge science that advances sustainable food and agricultural systems, provides

for an abundant and safe food supply, promotes nutritional security, supports the resiliency of rural communities, creates jobs, and develops the next generation of food and agricultural scientists.

"With these additional funds, new grant opportunities would open up for our nation's investigators. Currently nine out of 10 proposals submitted to the AFRI program are rejected for lack of funds, leaving thousands of innovative projects with no funding and no other source of funding. This creates a situation where the best and brightest ideas to address societal problems are unfunded, just when we need them the most.

"Additionally, undergraduate and graduate students, along with postdoctoral researchers needed for our nation's agricultural workforce are educated and trained with funding from the AFRI program. Industry and public institutions depend on an educated workforce to fill innovation jobs. The national employment opportunities outlook for agricultural fields predicts that approximately 58,000 job openings per year will occur from now through 2020; America's educational institutions in these fields are able to produce only approximately 35,500 graduates, leaving a gap of approximately 22,500 vacant positions needed for addressing complex agricultural problems.

"Investments in AFRI will strengthen the American economy, its communities, and their people. A number of economic analyses have shown strong and consistent evidence that investment in agricultural research and extension efforts has yielded \$20 in returns for every dollar spent. Investment in applied research will bring practical solutions to farmers and help small businesses become more profitable.

"As a nation, we must increase food production to meet the demands of the burgeoning population projected to reach more than nine billion by 2050. Today, about 14 percent of U.S. households are food insecure and do not have enough to eat on a daily basis, and almost one-third of U.S. adults (more than 72 million people) and 17 percent of children are obese. Nutritional deficiencies exist even when food is abundant and available.

"During the past seven years since AFRI was established, the program has led to true innovations and groundbreaking discoveries in agriculture to combat childhood obesity, improve and sustain rural economic growth, address water availability issues, increase food production, find new sources of energy, mitigate the impacts of climate variability and enhance resiliency of our food systems, and ensure food safety.

"The President's move to fully fund AFRI is the right thing to do right now. We hope Congress funds AFRI at the President's requested level, so that our best and brightest scientists can find solutions to our most pressing societal and global challenges."

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT NIFA'S AGRICULTURE AND FOOD RESEARCH INITIATIVE, VISIT WWW.NIFA.USDA.GOV/PROGRAM/AGRICULTURE-AND-FOOD-RESEARCH-INITIATIVE-AFRI.

NIFA invests in and advances agricultural research, education, and extension and seeks to make transformative discoveries that solve societal challenges. Learn more by visiting www.nifa.usda.gov or following [@USDA_NIFA](https://twitter.com/USDA_NIFA) on Twitter. | USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer | February 2016